

DRAFT #2

TO: Amherst Select Board

FROM: Reikka Simula, Chair of Committee on Homelessness

RE: March 2010 Report to Select Board
Attachment I -- Evaluation of the Warming Place Homeless Shelter of 2009
Attachment II -- Letters from the Shelter guests

DATE: June 7, 2010

To fulfill one of the charges of the Committee on Homelessness, I am submitting this March 2010 Report to the Select Board on behalf of the Committee. This semi-annual report has been reviewed by the Committee. It incorporated all the feedback and comments from the Committee members.

The Committee wishes to express its appreciation to Mr. Gerry Weiss-- our former Select Board liaison, who served the Committee well during his tenure with the Committee.

Summary of projects completed

In this Committee's Report to Select Board, I will briefly summarize for you the projects completed during the period spanning from October 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010. The Committee on Homelessness has made steady progress in helping the Town to address homeless issues.

The first to be mentioned is the establishment of a Warming Place/Temporary Overnight Shelter at the First Baptist Church. It opened on December 14, 2009 and closed for the season on April 30, 2010.

Secondly, the Committee advocated for, and received \$7,200 CDBG funds for an architectural feasibility study. The purpose of the Study is to identify all applicable zoning and building codes for a seasonal homeless shelter, to conduct a cost estimate for a building to be code-compliant, and finally to file application and to seek approvals by the zoning and building commissioner for the shelter.

Thirdly, the Committee received the completed feasibility study for a permanent housing with on-site social services for the people who have been chronically homeless. The Study recommended Mount Pleasant Apartments on 336 and 346 North Pleasant Street to be the most suitable site for this project. Hampshire County Interfaith Housing Corporation ---- an Amherst non-profit organization, is negotiating with the owner. The Corporation plans to

donate \$500,000+ on top of the \$450,000 the Town has secured from the 2009 CDBG for housing for the homeless.

Lastly, the Committee has been working on continuing the homeless shelter project for the winter of 2010 as soon as the Warming Place was set up in December, 2009. After much research and conversation with houses of worship, the Committee is finalizing its recommendations to the SB regarding this coming winter. Please see charge # 3 below for Committee's recommendations.

To make it easier for you to read the Report, at the suggestion of one of our members, I will go over the Committee's charges and summarize the progress under each charge made from October 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010. The recommendations are in **bold**. The charges are in **bold** and *italicized*.

1. To attend meetings and participate as an official representative of the Town of Amherst in Northampton/Holyoke Regional Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness initiative.

The Committee was not aware of any meeting taken place in the Region in this regard. However, I have been planning on inviting Pamela Schwartz to one of our meetings to learn about the progress made in the region, and possibilities for networking with other entities. She is the director of the Western Mass Network to End Homelessness.

2. To collaborate with other towns/cities and their relevant committees, as well as any relevant Amherst committees to find cooperative approaches for support of the homeless in Amherst.

During this reporting period, the Committee met with people who shared with us of their expertise and experience regarding homelessness.

a.) Valley CDC, and Grants Work

These agencies made a presentation to the Committee in October 2009. They were contracted by the Town to complete a feasibility study on supportive permanent housing for the homeless. They identified funding sources and housing sites--including Mount Pleasant Apartments on 336 and 346 North Pleasant Street to be the most suitable site for this project. For more details, please refer to the Feasibility Study Housing for the Homeless Individuals and Families, October 2009. A copy can be obtained through the Community Development Department.

b.) Community Development Committee (CDC)

The Committee presented a written proposal to CDC during its December 2009 public hearing. The Committee recommended funding of \$80,000 for a drop-in center. The Center is similar to the Northampton Drop-In Center in that it offers the homeless or anyone at risk of becoming homeless service referrals and case management. In addition, the Committee also recommended the funding recommendation of \$40, 000 for a full-fledged homeless shelter for 2010 winter.

Unfortunately, neither of the recommendations was accepted by CDC. Instead, CDC funded a \$55,000 request by a Springfield-based non profit agency-- Center for Human Development (CHD). The request was made for the operation of a warming place type of operation.

The Committee recommends to the Select Board that, a warming place type of operation where guests cannot sleep should be replaced by a full-fledged homeless shelter where guests can sleep in the facility. The Committee does not support CDC's recommendation. The Committee recommended that the \$55,000 should be allocated for the operation of a homeless shelter for 2010 winter.

c.) Northampton Cot Shelter

Ms. Wanda Rolon and Danielle DeBarry--- officials from the Northampton Cot Shelter and the Grove Street Inn, shared their knowledge of operating a seasonal homeless shelter and a permanent homeless shelter with the Committee at one of Committee's meetings in March, 2010. The Committee learned that the opening of our shelter in Amherst did NOT decrease the demand for their shelters. They remained busy as the previous years. In their experience, from the perspectives of financial contributions and volunteers, they observed the support from faith communities and community at large is important for the success of the Cot Shelter. They believed the work done by volunteers in terms of nutritious meals provision and positive, supportive visits from volunteers to the Shelter guest helped to give the Shelter the feel of a community than an institution.

The Committee recommends to the SB that, based on the experience of the Northampton Cot Shelter and that of the Committee members --- who collectively put in several hundred hours last winter at the Warming Place shelter, houses of worship and the community at large need to be involved to support the operation of the shelter in Amherst.

3. To research and make recommendations to the Select Board of the best known practices to end homelessness in Amherst.

To end homelessness in Amherst, the Committee believes the Select Board's regional approach is a sound one. You authorized-- as part of the official charges, that the Committee participate as an official representative of the Town in the Regional Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness initiative.

More specifically, the Committee has five specific recommendations to make to the Select Board:

1.) Prompt construction of supportive permanent housing for the homeless

From public policy perspective, it has been demonstrated by studies conducted and cited by the Regional Plan to End Homelessness group that it is more cost-effective to provide supportive permanent housing for the homeless than keeping them in shelters. For the purpose of constructing permanent housing with on-site social services to support the chronically homeless, the Committee recommends to the Select Board to keep this as a priority and to utilize the \$500,000 donations made by the Hampshire County Interfaith Housing Corporation, and the \$450,000 approved in 2009 CDBG funding timely before the grant expires at the end of 2010.

2.) While the Feasibility Study by CDC and Grants Work recommended several sites for this purpose, the Committee wishes to recommend to the SB to consider the old Salvation Army building (behind Ren's Mobil Station) as a potential site. This recommendation is made under an informed deliberation with an experienced developer in town. The Committee believes it costs less per housing unit if starting from a new building rather than retrofitting a building to meet building codes-- which would be the case for the Mount Pleasant Apartments.

In this proposal, the old Salvation Army building would be taken down and a multi-story building will be built on the site. Ideally, the first story would contain a homeless shelter and a comprehensive social services center. The second story and up would contain enhanced single room occupancy units. The enhanced SRO will include a kitchenette and a bathroom with about 300-400 square feet in size.

3.) Re-allocating the \$55,000 funding recommended by CDC from operating a warming place to a full-fledged shelter with social services for the homeless. While Amherst is working to build supportive permanent housing for the homeless, there are still needs for emergency shelter for the homeless. As we learned from last winter, the homeless are best served, not with a warming place type of operation but with a real shelter with on-site social services.

4.) Re-opening the Request for Proposal (RFP) process for selecting an agency for homeless shelter management

The Committee believes CDCs' recommendation to fund CHD's proposal for a warming place is made NOT in the best interest of the homeless. The Committee believes the RFP process should be re-opened, and that an experienced agency needs to be secured to run a full-fledged shelter. In order to ensure that a shelter will be up and running on November 1, 2010 as recommended by the Committee, the Committee recommends to the Select Board the following timetable:

- a) Committee provides input for the RFP: June 24, 2010
- b) Committee review RFP; RFP be mailed out: July 8, 2010
- c) RFP response deadline: August 5, 2010
- d) Committee reviews RFP responses and votes for two for interview: August 12, 2010
- e) Committee interviews two agencies and vote for one: August 19, 2010

5.) A two-prong approach for the 2010 winter shelter

The Committee wishes to recommend to the SB that it is preferable to have the homeless shelter located in one site for the duration of six months --- from November 1, 2010 to April 30, 2011. This is Plan A. This plan can happen if the site shelter can receive zoning and building permits or the site can appeal and receive exemption and waiver from authorities. If Plan A does not work, then the Committee would recommend Plan B. Instead of a seasonal shelter operated in one location, the Committee would recommend that four to five sites be selected and sequentially, each houses a Temporary Overnight Shelter for six weeks -- six days on and seventh day off, as required by the State law, with 35 days maximum per facility per year. In this case, the occupancy permit is easier to obtain as compared to the seasonal shelter in Plan A.

For Plan A, the Committee recommends the following sites to the SB for an architectural study: First Baptist Church, Immanuel Lutheran Church (subject to its June 14, 2010 meeting approval), the modular classrooms at the Marks Meadow Elementary School/UMass ground. Thanks to the Committee's proposal to CDC, there is funding for the Architectural Feasibility Study. At the completion of the Study, info on codes for shelter,

estimate for a facility to be code compliant for the purpose of being a shelter, and the application for the permit are all part of the Study.

For Plan B, the Committee recommends the following sites to the SB for the Architectural Feasibility Study. These sites are near or at downtown area and are on bus route. To ensure there is enough time for a facility to modify its building to satisfy code requirements, the Committee recommends the Study be concluded by July 15, 2010.

- First Baptist Church
- First Congregational Church
- MercyHouse
- UU Society
- Immanuel Lutheran Church
- North Congregational Church
- Grace Church
- St. Brigid's Church
- Jewish Community of Amherst

4. To assist the Town and Town Manager in implementing the recommendations.

The Committee on Homelessness assisted the Town and Town Manager in implementing the recommendations to the SB in the following ways:

- a) To secure a site for the warming place in 2009 winter-- with the complete approval of the Community Service Director and full knowledge of the Town, committee members carried a letter signed by the Director explaining Town's intent in renting a space to the houses of worship in Amherst in November 2009. Coupled with the fact that several Committee members hold membership in houses of worship, and their familiarity with the houses of worship, at the end, not one-- but three houses of worship offered to house the Warming Place: Unitarian Universalist Society, MercyHouse, and First Baptist Church. With all things considered, the First Baptist Church was selected as the site for the Warming Place last winter.
- b) To better understand the needs of the Warming Place guests and to make more appropriate recommendations to the Select Board regarding the best practices in the field, Committee members collectively put in several hundreds of hours of volunteer time last winter at the Warming Place. They either stayed all night at the Shelter, served hot meals to the guests, provided homeless outreach, or donated food and clothing. With the on-the-ground volunteering experience and first-hand understanding of the operation of the Warming Place, the Committee put together a document for

the SB on the evaluation of the Warming Place. This document is inserted at the end here.

c) The Committee further developed a feedback survey for the guests of the Warming Place to provide input on the quality of the Warming Place. Based on informal feedback provided by the guests, and letters received by the Committee from guests, the Committee further elaborated on the strengths and weakness of the Warming Place. Please see the Evaluation of the Warming Place at the end.

d) To further collaboratively work to support the homeless with other entities-- as stated in the charge #2 above, the Committee helped to implement its recommendation of converting the Warming Place to Temporary Overnight Shelter whereby guests are allowed to sleep on premises. It met with CHD representatives and the Town's Building Commissioner to understand the permitting process. It further worked with the First Baptist Church to ensure the inspections would pass.

e) When the Warming Place was being shut down on March 22, 2010--- six weeks prior to CHD's contracted date, the Committee held emergency meetings working with Mr. Weiss to seek reversal of the decision. As a result, the facility was kept open until April 30, 2010--- the end of the contract.

5. To brief the Select Board and file written reports to Select Board in September and March of every year on the Committee's work/progress.

The Committee wishes to recommend to the SB that future report be filed in November and May. The reason is that shelter in general ends at the end of April and it would be of greater benefit to the SB if the Committee can evaluate the shelter experience from the previous winter and make recommendations to the SB at the end of the shelter season--- such as in May month. Finally, November would have been a better time for the Committee to report to the SB. By then the shelter would have been set up. The Committee would have plenty to discuss with the SB and to make valuable policy recommendations for the following winter.

6. To make recommendations to the Amherst Housing Authority and the Community Preservation Act Committee.

The Committee has not made any recommendations to the Amherst Housing Authority or the Community Preservation Act Committee this last six months

For a review of the Shelter 2009, please see Attachment I: Evaluation of the Warming Place/Shelter of 2009.

For input from Shelter 2009 guests about the Shelter experience, please see Attachment II: Letters from homeless shelter guests.

The Committee will soon finalize its deliberation on Mr. Gerry Weiss's proposal to the SB last January regarding consolidating Committee on Homelessness, Community Development Committee and Housing Partnership/Fair Housing. Our recommendation to the SB will be forthcoming. We will deliver it in time for your June 28, 2010 meeting. We request to be notified of this discussion by the SB.

Thank you for taking the time to read the documents. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions regarding the Report or its attachments.

Sincerely yours,

Reikka Simula

Attachment I: the Evaluation of 2009 Warming Place Homeless Shelter

Draft #2

To: Select Board
Fm: Reikka Simula, Chair of the Committee on Homelessness
Re: Evaluation of the 2009 Warming Place Homeless Shelter (the Shelter)
Date: May 24, 2010

The Committee appreciated the fact that Ms. O'Keeffe and Ms. Brewer attended our meeting on April 29, 2010. Looking ahead toward working with the Town Manager and the Committee on continuing a homeless shelter for the 2010-2011 winter, Ms. O'Keeffe and Ms. Brewer suggested at the meeting that the Committee assists the Select Board in this regard by documenting what worked and what did not at the Warming Place Homeless Shelter for 2009-2010 winter. The Committee appreciated this suggestion and prepared the document here for the Select Board.

Below is the Committee's evaluation of the 2009 Warming Place Homeless Shelter:

WHAT WORKED?

1. Provision of a safe place

The Warming Place provided a safe place for the homeless. This is the first time that Amherst provided a co-ed shelter for adult homeless individuals. Over the years, Amherst has always sent its homeless to the Interfaith Cot Shelter in Northampton. However, a large number of homeless have declined to go to Northampton and preferred to be in Amherst. Based on a recent study quoted in the Valley CDC's 2010 Feasibility Study -- it was found there were 16 "unsheltered" homeless individuals roaming on the streets of Amherst at a one-point-in-time winter survey. The Committee on Homelessness believed this was a serious problem and recommended to the Town that a shelter is needed for the homeless. The Warming Place housed as many as 24 guests per night on several of the coldest nights last winter. Overall speaking, more than 50 different individuals accessed the Shelter during its operation.

2. Committee members' knowledge and connection with houses of worship

To assist the Town in securing a site for the shelter in a short two weeks in November 2009, members of the Committee-- working with Town staff Mr. Rosenblatt, and Select Board liaison Mr. Weiss, approached many facilities including the Bangs Community Center, and six houses of worship. At the end, three churches offered its space. They were the Unitarian Universalist Society, MercyHouse, and the First Baptist Church. Four of the then Committee members attended these churches regularly and were familiar with the decision-making bodies within these churches. Without our

members' knowledge and connection with area houses of worship, it would have been impossible to come up with the Shelter site in such a short period

3. Community support

From day one of the Shelter operation, volunteers from the community played an integral part of the operation. Volunteers--- from UMass, Amherst College, numerous churches, and the community at large, prepared homemade soup and sandwiches and brought them to the Shelter and offered support and friendship to the guests. From December 14 when the Warming Place was first open until March 31, 2010--when volunteers were still welcome at the Shelter, EVERY night volunteers donated enough food to feed 15 to 20 people. The cash value of food donated equals \$75 to \$100 per night. The total cash value for the 100 nights of food donated --the period of time when food was allowed to be donated by people in the community. is estimated to worth \$7,500 to \$10,000.

The community also donated personal hygiene items such as soap, tooth brushes, face cloths, clothes, among other items. In addition to these material goods, volunteers also spent time nightly visiting with the guests to provide company and encouragement. Some volunteers stayed overnight awake to assist and support staff working there. On average, two to three volunteers were at the Shelter nightly providing six hours or more of total hours of human contact time. Volunteers came very night until they were prohibited from coming on April 1, 2010. The cash-equivalent for the volunteer service is \$60 or more per night and the total cash-equivalent value for the first 100 nights when volunteers were allowed is estimated to be worth \$6,000 or more.

4. Additional support from other social service agencies

Staff members from the Elliot Social Services and Amherst Community Connections were present every night during the Shelter's entire operation until it closed on April 30, 2010. They did not receive funding from the Town. They volunteered their services to serve and support the guests at the Shelter. It collaborated with the Center for Human Development (CHD) to bridge the service gap. CHD provided staff coverage to manage the shelter, and these two agencies provided outreach professionals to assist guests to move on from the Shelter to permanent housing, and from being jobless to being gainfully employed. In addition, they assisted them to work on accessing health care, food stamps and other public benefit programs.

The cash-equivalent value for the professional staff onsite for two hours per night is estimated to be \$50. It comes out to be \$6,500 for the entire 130 days of the shelter season.

To monetize the support of the community and the professional service agencies, the Shelter is estimated to have received \$20,000 to \$22,500 worth of goods and services. In other words, the Town was able to leverage its \$33,000 shelter budget by another \$20,000 to \$22,500. In this way, the guests at the Shelter received services and more than just shelter. They were provided with nutritious hot food, personal encouragement and outreach staff advocacy.

In summary, the reason the Shelter was able to be up and running in such a short period of time, to a large extent, was due to the knowledge and connections of members of the Community on Homelessness had with the area's houses of worship. Secondly, the support of the community at large -- which includes houses of worship, area colleges, and other local social service agencies, also contributed to the success of the Shelter. (According to the following past speakers at COH meetings who direct and manage homeless sheltering programs, they all concluded in their presentations about their programs to us with statements that emphasized the fact that community support and involvement is absolutely essential for the programs to be a success within the community: Ann Lentini- founder and CEO of Domus Inc. Westfield ,Ma.; Yvonne Francerro- founder and CEO of Friends of the Homeless Northampton Ma.-group that started Interfaith Cot Shelter; Wanda Rolon- Program Manager of the Overnight Cot Shelter; Danielle DeBarry- Program Manager of The Grove Street Inn Northampton.)

WHAT DID NOT WORK?

1. Lack of initial involvement by the Committee in the RFQ process

The Committee on Homelessness was very surprised when it was informed by the staff liaison to the Committee that the Town had accepted a RFQ (Request for Quote) submitted by Center for Human Development (CHD) in October, 2009. In the RFQ, CHD proposed to rent and staff an apartment which was to be used to house three or four people who are homeless.

Based on the official statistics released, and the first-hand information from Committee members of which two were previously homeless, and one heads a non-profit organization working with the homeless in Amherst, the Committee knew the number of homeless was on the order of 15 to 20 people. The Committee believed the funds would be best used if a larger facility to house more people could be found. The Committee argued that the apartment concept was a bad one. It simply severely underestimated the number of homeless individuals in Amherst.

It took a lot of struggle and work on the part of the Committee to convince the Town not to rent an apartment and instead focusing on finding a facility where people could come in from the cold and be safe for the winter. Had the Committee been involved from the beginning, this unfortunate struggle could have been avoided.

2. Lack of operational consistency by the managing agency

CHD was the agency contracted by the Town to manage the Warming Place shelter. It provided staff coverage for the Shelter. When the Shelter was first open, CHD acknowledged and welcome volunteers from the Amherst community. Volunteers prepared and delivered food nightly to guests. Volunteers visited the guests at the Shelter. Some stayed overnight assisting the staff. This went on smoothly from December 14, 2009 when the Shelter was first open until March 31. Then, on April 1, 2010 without any prior notification to guests, food delivery and volunteers were prohibited from the Shelter. This abrupt change in the operation caused a lot of anxiety

and confusion among the guests and volunteers. The lack of operational consistency made guests and volunteers felt they were being disrespected and disregarded.

3. Lack of transparency in closing the Shelter by Town Manager and the managing agency

The Town Manager and CHD announced on March 19 that-- due to warmer weather a week prior, and the lack of shower/bathing facility at the Shelter and other factors, the Shelter was to be closed on March 22. The guests were shocked by the fact that they were only given three days of notice and that they had very little time to make sheltering arrangements. The Committee was very disappointed by the lack of consultation by the Town. Up to that point, the Committee was not being apprised by the Town Manager nor the staff liaison on the issue of closing the Shelter earlier. Further, the Committee was surprised by the amount of misinformation the Town Manager cited regarding the legal requirements a homeless shelter--such as the Warming Place needs to meet, and by the fact that the misinformation was cited by the Town Manager as grounds for closing the Shelter sooner than the originally scheduled date of April 30, 2010.

With protest from Shelter guests, volunteers, the public, and Committee members, and with the help of the press, and with petitions signed by more than 400 people in the course of two days, the Town Manager and CHD retracted on March 22 --the day when the Shelter was supposed to be closed, that it would delay the closing from March 22 to March 31.

The attempted sudden closing of the Shelter by the Town Manager and CHD again caused a great deal of anxiety and frustration among the guests and volunteers. The unfortunate decision to close the Shelter by the Town Manager and CHD resulted in huge public outcry against the Town and CHD. The loss of public confidence in these two bodies is considerable. Throughout the whole process, the Committee felt strongly there was a lack of transparency in the handling of the matter by the Town Manager and CHD. The Committee regrets their disregard for an open and transparent process.

4. Lack of commitment, competence, and compassion of the managing agency

In February 2010, in light of the fact that state had just provided a more flexible emergency shelter permit to local government, and the fact that guests were not allowed to sleep at the Shelter, the Committee urged CHD to apply to the Building Commissioner for Temporary Overnight Shelter permit. By obtaining the TOS permit, the Shelter guests would be allowed to sleep on cots at night. This would be a more humane treatment of the guests. Despite having already given a verbal commitment to the Committee to apply for TOS permit, CHD still failed to apply for the TOS permit at the end of March, 2010. It was not until a local non-profit agency filed for the TOS permit, when CHD finally followed suit and decided to file their application. The lack of commitment on CHD's part to file for TOS permit under the law disappointed the Committee and the public a great deal.

Without any communication with the guests or the volunteers, CHD prohibited volunteers from bringing food to the Shelter. Volunteers were barred from entering the facility. Guests were outraged by the sudden policy change on food and on volunteers.

CHD called the Amherst Police Department repeatedly to remove volunteers. The incompetence displayed by CHD staff over its handling of volunteers and its inability to communicate effectively with guests caused the Committee to doubt CHD's ability to operate the Shelter for 2010 winter. Thus, in April 2010 the Committee voted to ask the Town to re-open the RFP process seeking a qualified agency to run the shelter for 2010-2011 winter.

The Committee received letters from numerous guests complaining of the lack of compassion and professionalism by CHD staff. They addressed letters to the Town Manager and CHD and asked them to intervene on their behalf. Matters of concern brought by the guests include delayed entry at night and forced premature departure in the morning, abusive language by staff, mis-use of authority by staff, among others. Attached please see the letters received by the Committee.

It is the opinion of the Committee that CHD lacked the commitment, competency, and compassion needed to run a homeless shelter successfully last winter. The Committee recommended to the Select Board that the RFP process be re-opened to select a qualified agency to run next winter's shelter.

WHAT IS NEEDED FOR A GOOD SHELTER THIS WINTER?

Members of the Committee on Homelessness volunteered at the Shelter nearly every night. We speak from our own observation what worked and what did not work at the Shelter. We believe the following elements are needed for a good shelter for this coming winter:

1. Community involvement in providing a hot meal and human interaction

The involvement of the community from houses of worship, the higher education institutions, and the public has proved to be invaluable. Nutritious hot meals were prepared and delivered nightly. Volunteers interacted with Shelter guests to provide encouragement and positive interaction. The added value of providing hot meals and involvement of volunteers to the Shelter operation-- both in terms of monetary value and in human resource value, is tremendous. Any agency selected by the Town to manage the Shelter needs to have the capacity to work with community volunteers.

2. Social service within the Shelter

It is never the intent of the Committee to keep people coming back to the Shelter day after day week after week. The Committee believes social services are an important component of the Shelter operation. Social services provided at the Shelter should include; assistance in obtaining housing, employment, substance treatment programs, Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly Food Stamp program), Mass Health, and others. The Committee believes a shelter program without the social service component is incomplete and irresponsible. It only gives people a one-way ticket to enter a homeless shelter but does not provide them with a way to exit the shelter.

3. Obtaining Shelter permit timely by the contracting agency

The number of homeless individuals that request and/or use services in Amherst averages between 15-25 and sometimes more. This past winter over 50 different individuals visited the Shelter. The highest number of guests staying at the Shelter was 24. This occurred several times. Based on last winter's experience, the Committee notes it is essential for any agency receiving the Town's contract to operate a homeless shelter needs to be able to work with a facility to obtain shelter permit timely to open the shelter by November 1, 2010

4. A welcoming, compassionate and inclusive Shelter

To prevent the homeless from being required to pass unnecessary sheltering obstacles, the Committee believes the Shelter needs to be as inclusive as possible. To that extent, the Committee believes so long as guests behave in a respectful, responsible, and peaceable manner in the Shelter, no one should be excluded from the Shelter. The Committee believes a behavior-based shelter policy, rather than a soberness-based shelter policy serves the homeless best. Finally, the managing agency has to be able to demonstrate that

- a.) It respects the rights of guests
- b.) It is capable of treating shelter guests in a compassionate and positive manner
- c.) It believes in empowering the shelter guests to maintain a positive atmosphere through self-policing rather than relying on rigid set of rules.

The Committee appreciates the opportunity to share with the Select Board our observations and evaluation of the Shelter. We are gratified to be able to offer you our opinions on what is needed for a shelter to be successful. We request that the Select Board schedule a half-an-hour block on your June 14 or 28 agenda for the Committee to meet with you go over our recommendations.

We look forward to working with you and serving the needs of the people who are homeless in our community. Thank you for your guidance on this matter.

Sincerely,

Reikka Simula, Chair of the Committee on Homelessness

ATTACHMENT II

Homeless Get The Shaft! On March 22, 2010, The Warming Place closes at short notice. Instead of closing on April 30, 2010. About 6 weeks short of what the contract says. They should be accountable. They are Indian givers. Sign the Center for Human Development up to the end of April 30, 2010, and take the money. Then, when it gets warm outside, Homeless Get the Shaft. And the money is not refunded. Goes to show you cannot trust your own local government or anybody.

By Dennis Tower

(Guest of Warming place)

March 22, 2010

Dear Mr. Shaffer and Mr. Goodwin,

We just want you to know that we are very shocked that you decided to close the Warming Place on Monday, March 22. You gave us less than three days notice. This is unacceptable. Many of us have been staying here since it opened last December. We do not have a place to stay that is why we came to the Warming Place. We need time to make plans. We need time to find a place to stay. Three days notice is simply not enough.

For the past several nights, we have been asking the staff what is the plan to help us find shelter. They were as lost as we were. They just shook their head and were not able to offer us any help. How can you treat us like this?

Just put yourself in our shoes. When we first came here in December, we were told the Warming Place was contracted to open until April 30. Then we heard the place might be closed sooner than that. We kept asking the staff if they knew when the place would be closed. Nobody we asked knew. They said it might be sometime in April, but they did not know.

Then boom. When we came in Friday night, March 19, the staff told us the last day the place would be open was Sunday, March 21. How would you like it if people did this to you? We are just like you. We want to plan ahead and know where we can stay tonight. You closed the Warming Place all of a sudden. We are disgusted by the way you treat us. You have no respect for us. You don't care where we sleep from here on. You just want to shove us out of the door. You treat us like garbage. The homeless get the shaft!

Mr. Goodwin you said in the paper that the Warming Place is no longer needed since the weather this week has been warm. But you know the weather can get cold again. We found out on the Internet the temperature on March 22, 2007 was a shocking 1 F! Last year, it was only 7 F. We still need a place to stay at night. The weather is still cold in March.

We want the Warming Place to continue to be open. We want you to give us at least two weeks notice. We need you to guarantee us that we can go to the Warming Place every night until when the contract runs out on April 30. Those of us who get assistance checks do not have any money until the 1st or 3rd of the month. This sudden closing puts us in a position where we have nothing to bargain with or offer anyone who may give us shelter.

Having shelter is a basic human right. You are robbing us of our basic right. This is just not right. We want you to do the right thing. We don't need your pity. We need your help.

Sincerely yours,

From all of us at the Warming Place

3/29/2010

Dear Mr. Goodwin,

My name is Angela Hensley. I have been staying at the Warming Place since January, 2010. I do not like the way the shelter is being run now.

- 1). There is no more volunteers at the Warming Place now. They used to come every night. They help us by talking to us, playing board games with us, serving us homemade food etc. They showed interest in the guests and me. They cared about us. It is a big loss not to have volunteers from the community. I want the volunteers back to the Warming Place again. Many of the guests there feel like me - they also want the volunteers back. We will be willing to go to the paper and tell our story. We will do everything in our power to get the shelter back to where it was.

- 2) The staff kicked me out this morning at 6:30 AM. They told me they wanted to get out early. I told them the contract says the shelter is open until 7:00 AM. They said that it does not matter because I was the only one left at the shelter and they just want to go home early.

I want the shelter to stay open until 7:00 AM as the contract says. Staff should not have any right to change the hours. The staff is paid from 10:00 PM to 7:00 AM. I don't think it's fair for the staff to make their own choices when the shelter can open or close.

1) I believe there are too many staffs working there every night. Last night there were four staffs there. They sat there talking to each other. They did not care to interact with me or other guests. They have been doing this since March 22, 2010 - when the shelter was re-open.

Why do we need so many staff there when there are only three or four guests? We used to have just two people working and volunteers were there to help. It's a waste of taxpayers' money by having so many wasteful choices on CHD.

We want you to change the wasteful practice.

In summary, we want you to know that we are angry and frustrated that how your organization is running the shelter the way it is now. So, we want to tell you that either you change the way you run the shelter or we the people will change it for you. We are so tired of this nonsense! We want the shelter continues the way it was. We want volunteers back. We want homemade food. We want the place that we can rest comfortably at night so that we can be productive the next day. We want to be able to put our lives together during the day so we will not have to go to a homeless

shelter again.

Angelo & Hensley

Angelo P. Ghersey

cc Larry Shaffer

Reikka Simola

March 31, 2010

Dear Jim Goodwin,

My name is Ralph Reed. I was at the Warming Place last night. I was treated by one of the staff rudely and perhaps, unfairly. I do not know her name but believe she was the supervisor.

I did not know of the 10-person limit but while waiting in line outside of the Warming Place, a volunteer mentioned that I should stay in line. As the Church door opened, I walked in with others who were waiting to get in as well. We were walking in a line entering the Church. When we walked in, we saw only one staff person there. So we helped her set up the mats and tables, and I went to bathroom soon after. When I came out of the bathroom, I saw one more person who had just arrived. The supervisor, who herself had just arrived complained to the newest person about the 10 person limit having potentially been exceeded as I left the bathroom, and upon seeing me said frowningly that we definitely had passed over the limit. She then began reading names from a list for attendance purposes. Halfway through she stopped and asked me my name. I told her and she scanned the list and seeing my name wasn't on it. She asked me to leave. I asked her how the list was produced and after some stonewalling on her part deduced that people had started signing in while I was carrying mats.

I feel like this was arbitrary and unfair to me and she lacked empathy. At best she inappropriately enforced a rule as I'd entered the church before the limit was passed and the newest person, who'd clearly arrived after me was allowed to stay.

Sincerely,

Ralph Reed

CC: Larry Shaeffer
Reikka Simula, chair Committee on Homelessness

4-1-2010

I Stewart Smith arriving
at the First Baptist Church Amherst
warming center at about 9:45 3/31/2010
was waiting to enter.

As I was waiting seven or eight
citizens were there, some seemed very
tired others distraught or depressed,
considering their situation understandable.

A member of the Center for Humane
Development was in the building.

People outside were making note of the
time. At around 10:10 a
member of the C.H.D. (Carole Gezzelle)
came to the door without opening it, she
appeared to be counting people.

As she approached the door people
began gathering their belongings to
enter the building. The C.H.D. employee
walked away refusing anybody entry.

At that point somebody knocked at the door asking (wait let us in).

She replied she had work to do and ~~was~~ was not ready and she was tired, at that point someone replied, let us in that is the work you were paid to do. The people were

Surprised, why wouldnt she let us in. People were tired, cold, and needed to use the rest room but the C.H.D. employe walked back down the hall ignoring every body.

At 10:20 the C.H.D. employe returned, speaking through the door she said there was only room for five. People began questioning this asking what this meant and she clarified five men and three women. Someone said to her 'thats eight people the night before the church accomidated ten people.

At that time she pointed to me
and another individual stating 'you two
have to go your not from around here).

I then asked her how she had come
to that conclusion and where did
these mandates and guidelines originate.

Others began to protest asking
'Its almost 10:30 are you going to let
us in' No she said 'I still have work
to do. Again someone replied to her
"~~work~~ ^{work} you are to open the door and
get people out of the elements"

At 10:30 another C.H.D. employee arrived
only then were we allowed to come
in.

Later on I asked a few CHD
employees if they had received any type of
training or consulted on how to help
at risk people, they skirted the question
saying they were staff members.

Again I asked if they had received
any professional training or certification,
showing they ^{were} ~~the~~ capable of helping
at risk people. I got no answer.

Consequently it seems to me that
their callous attitude and disregard
by the C.H.D. members caused more
stress and harm to the people they
promised to serve.

Sincerely

Stewart Smith

cc. Reikha Simula
Larry Shaffer
James Goodwin

4-6-2010

Hi Reikka and the Committee,

I have been attending your public meetings and felt very encouraged by the letters you read. These are people who saw what is going on at the shelter and they wrote about it. I want to add my thought here and ask you to read it at your meeting.

On March 23, I was at the shelter. Carol –the supervisor, played mind game with me. She asked me why I went to the committee meetings and helped the homeless people. I felt she had an attitude. She did not want me to tell the truth. She then asked me what my religion was. I told her I am a Pentecostal. She made fun of my religion. She used our conversation to entertain her and to keep her awake. She told me I need psychiatric help because of my religion. At one point, she said to me, "Why are you here? If you do not like it, you have a car you can leave anytime". She made me very uncomfortable. She tried to push my buttons. I was very tired but I was not allowed to sleep. She insulted my beliefs and she made fun of my religion. She tried to get me to have altercation with her so she can throw me out.

Another staff was there that night too. I think her name is Cat. A Korean woman brought in some rice and soup for us to eat at around 10:00 that night. But the Carol and other staff would not allow this. We have had food from volunteers for many months. I just do not get it why all of a sudden the food is not allowed at the shelter. I saw the staff grabbed the food away from the volunteer Kevin when he tried to heat up the food. Carol and Cat sat at the staff table and chatted. I was sitting to the side and talked to them from time to time. At one point in the conversation, in my presence, they talked about dick and other body parts. I felt very uncomfortable and decided to leave the conversation.

At about 3:00 AM, Cat heated up the rice and drained the soup but kept the vegetables for me, Ed, and Cory. Carol was sleeping in the next room. We were all so hungry so we ate the food. After Carol woke up from her sleep, Cat told her about how she had heated up the food donated by the Korean woman and how we all ate the food. At that point, I realized that this could be a setup. They could throw us out because we ate the food that they did not want us to eat the first place. But then, it was Cat who heated up the food. I was worried that Cat was trying to tattletale on us. Later, I saw Cat went to sleep as well.

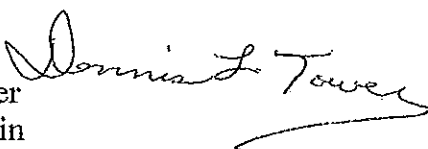
I was not allowed to sleep. I had not slept for two days because of the no sleeping new rule started on March 22. So, I saw what the staff was doing. They broke their own rule of no sleeping. They slept on the job. They did not allow volunteers to heat up the food donated by the Korean woman. But in the middle of the night, they heated up the food and let us eat it.

I really feel Carol is burned out. She does not care about us the homeless. She just wanted her way. Other staff are not too friendly. They talk among themselves. They do not have anything to talk to us about. I would not recommend CHD be hired to run the place again. I and other people want the place to be kept the way it was when Kevin ran it.

Dennis Tower

cc Larry Shaffer

Jim Goodwin



From: joanne Sunshower [mailto:jsunshower@verizon.net]
Sent: Sunday, March 21, 2010 6:31 PM
To: 'editor@gazettenet.com'
Subject: Letters to the Editor

Plea to Reconsider Closing of Warming Place

To: Larry Shaffer, Amherst Town Manager & Jim Goodwin, President, Center for Human Development

Dear Sirs:

I am a member of First Congregational Church in Amherst, home of Not Bread Alone, and work closely with area churches and the Amherst Survival Center on behalf of low income women. A focus group of volunteers and consumers at the Survival Center last year concluded that a top priority concern was the lack of any housing or shelter for people who have none on their own. That's why I was heartened by the opening of the Warming Place at the Baptist church, and by the opportunity to help by donating socks, blankets, toothbrushes and other basic items. Many of our church members are among the volunteers who supply shelter guests with soup and sandwiches every night.

I was shocked to read in the Gazette your plans for closing the Warming Place. I was further upset to find out that this information was only conveyed to the Baptist church and volunteers on Friday—not enough time to communicate the change to all the guests, since not all show up every night, so they could make other plans.

The original contract was to extend through April, when the threat of freezing is over. In fact, the night temperatures through March 30 are predicted to be below freezing, down to 17 degrees, with several days of rain or snow

I am surprised that there was not even informal consultation through area agencies or the Bangs Center with the wider community of support, so we could offer assistance or attempt to make other plans. Perhaps going forward, the town could supplement it's resources with the help of a committee or council of concerned citizens and faith communities.

Even now, I hope you will reconsider your decision, and invite community members into a conversation about how to make a more gradual and secure transition for the shelter guests.

Sincerely,

Joanne Sunshower

Shutesbury, MA

Warming Place

From: cmelhorn@mtholyoke.edu

To: shafferL@amherstma.gov, jgoodwin@chd.org

Sent: Mon, Mar 22, 2010 11:18 AM

Dear Town Manager Shaffer and CHD President Goodwin,

The announced sudden closing of the Amherst Warming Place can do little to re-assure local residents and volunteers that the Town of Amherst and the Center for Human Development really has at heart the best interests of *all* of our citizens. It seems like only yesterday that the Warming Place was created. To shut it down with so little notice, just now when the weather is turning colder again, seems callous, uncaring and unnecessary.

Of course weeks ago I wondered why the Town would address an obvious need to shelter the homeless with such seemingly inadequate facilities to begin with. (If indeed "inadequate facilities" is the real reason for deciding to shut the place down?). It seems unconscionable to invite people into a shelter for the night, and then not allow them to sleep, or even rest on mats. So, were supervisors expected to patrol the guests, prodding them awake? Did you use bright lights or loud music to prevent sleep, methods considered "torture" in some circles? Inadequate separation of males and female guests? Inadequate provisions for toileting or personal hygiene? Who was responsible for these arrangements in the first place?

I should think after last spring's fiasco with Not Bread Alone and all the resulting controversy and poor publicity, the CHD and Amherst Town officials would be more diligent to take positive and humane steps to care for the neediest among us.

Please re-consider a reprieve for the Warming Place until a better and more permanent solution to the need for adequate shelter for Amherst's homeless can be found.

Thank you.

Catharine Melhorn
14 Montague Road
Leverett, MA 01054

